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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001366

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE IN KANO RISING

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1635 E) LAGOS 1225

Classified by Ambassador Howard Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Summary: In a series of meetings held in Kano May 10-12, Government officials, religious leaders, academics and journalists repeatedly stressed to Poloff the "dangerous" level of tension between Kano's Hausa-Fulani "indigenes" and large "immigrant" Igbo and Yoruba population. Communal relations there have deteriorated since the Ambassador's visit in March, largely because of the continued perception among Kano's Hausa majority that the Lagos State Government is unwilling to prosecute OPC members responsible for the killing of Hausas in the Ajegunle incident last October (Ref. C). The activities of Shari'a vigilante groups have also increased apprehension among Southerners. Leaders on all sides are concerned, and are warning of the potential for a bloody inter-ethnic conflict in the city if something is not done to lessen the tension. The Obasanjo Administration's reluctance to go beyond immediate intervention in times of crisis has not helped to alleviate those concerns. If the Lagos and Kano Governors do not begin to coordinate their efforts, and take at least some steps towards reconciliation, another round of violence may be difficult to avoid. End Summary.

Storm Clouds

12. (C) The Chairman of the Kano chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Reverend G.A. Ojo, is pastor of the First Baptist Church, the largest Yoruba church in Kano. Ojo said that his church was being reduced to an all-male membership, as the Yoruba in Kano were sending their families back South. He said that tensions between Kano's Hausa majority and its Southern population had risen "significantly." Ojo praised the efforts of Governor Kwankwaso, the Emir of Kano, the police and Muslim religious leaders for preventing reprisals by Kano's Hausa against their Yoruba neighbors following the Ajegunle incident last October, in which an estimated one-hundred-fifty Hausas--largely from Kano--were killed in a Lagos suburb.

13. (C) Ojo said that Kano's long-resident Southern minority, which numbers in the range of half a million people, was very aware of the historical ebb and flow of inter-ethnic violence in Kano. That collective memory extends to the pogrom against Igbos in Kano in 1966--itself a reaction to the coup attempt in which mostly-Igbo officers killed Northern Premier Sir Ahmadu Bello, Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and other Nigerian leaders. By some estimates, up to 30,000 Southerners (mostly Igbo) were thought to have been killed in that incident, which was a major precipitating factor in the Biafran secession. Ojo commented that "everyone" was aware that tensions were particularly high at the moment, and that any of several eventual incidents--in Kano or Lagos--could spark a major episode of inter-ethnic violence. Ojo added that the Igbos in Sabon Gari were all armed, and implied that the Yorubas were as well. He said that a direct attack against Sabon Gari--a densely-populated, rectangular enclave of mostly Southerners approximately 2.5 by 1 kilometers--would be unlikely because it is essentially an "armed camp." Ojo predicted that the violence would probably be focused on the substantial number of Igbo and Yoruba living elsewhere in the city and its environs.

14. (C) Ojo asserted that while the Shari'a issue in Kano did not help matters, Christian leaders had confidence in the Government's intentions not to allow Shari'a to affect their population unduly. Their primary concern, he said, was with crime and mob violence. He added that an action by Shari'a enforcers, for example, could provide an opportunity for Kano's "Yandabas" (gangs of criminally inclined, unemployed youth) to set off unrest in order to begin looting. Ojo said that Kano's Hausas were "furious" over the failure of Lagos State to prosecute Frederic Fashehun (leader of the OPC) and

other OPC members for their perceived involvement in the Ajegunle incident. He complained bitterly about the actions of the OPC in Lagos and Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu: "Either they do not know that what they do puts us at risk, or they do not care. But we have no control over them. We can only sit and wait."

The National Police

15. (C) Deputy Commissioner of Police, Emmanuel Ezozue, an Igbo, confirmed that Kano's security situation had become "dangerous." He said that preventing reprisal violence after Ajegunle was a significant accomplishment, but added that anger in the Hausa community over that incident had not dissipated in the intervening seven months. If anything, he said, it was increasing because of a perceived lack of justice in Lagos and the severely depressed economy in Kano. Ezozue said, "My own brother left Kano for Abuja. It's just too dangerous." Asked whether Kano's police would be able to stop the unrest feared by many, the Deputy Commissioner said flatly, "No. There are too many of them, and not enough police."

The Governor

16. (C) Governor Kwankwaso discussed at length the recent Hisbah enforcement action against hotels that continue to serve alcohol in the State (Ref. A). He said that while he had arrested those involved in the burning of the Igbo-owned Henzina Hotel, he could not try them at this point because of the potential reaction by Shari'a supporters. Kwankwaso said that Kano's Hausa majority, independent of the Shari'a question, continued to be outraged by the failure to prosecute any of the organizers or perpetrators of the violence in Ajegunle. He was especially critical of Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu: "The man should have kept Fashehun under house arrest in his hotel, a house, anywhere, for six months so people up here would calm down. Letting him go after one week did not help me manage the situation here." (Comment: The Governor's statement is reflective of a broader misperception in the North over Fasheun's role in the violence. The investigation by National Police failed to find adequate evidence of Fasheun's involvement to support a murder charge, for which he was arrested. The fact that Ganiyu Adams, who is thought to control the militant wing of the OPC, is under house-arrest, does not seem to have registered with Northern leaders, who appear inappropriately fixated on Fasheun as the symbol of the militant OPC, and Lagos' State's disregard for Hausa lives. End Comment.)

17. (C) Kwankwaso said that he had requested but not received any help from the Obasanjo Administration on how to handle the increasingly precarious security situation in Kano. In the immediate aftermath of the Ajegunle violence, delegations sent by the Federal Government fanned out across the nation--including Kano--to preach peace and restraint. Clearly frustrated with the lack of current support from Abuja in addressing the causes of the violence, Kwankwaso declaimed: "Kano is the most difficult city in Nigeria to manage! It is the second largest in the country, and most of its people are poor, even by our standards. Lagos has bankers, lawyers--a middle class--in addition to its poor. I have a few rich Alhajis--the rest are nail clippers and people selling sugar-cane on the streets." Acknowledging the economic roots of recurring unrest in Kano, Kwankwaso added, "A hungry man is an angry man. And many people in Kano are hungry." (Comment: Lagos was recently called "uninhabitable" and a "jungle" by President Obasanjo. Incidents of violent crime in Lagos occur more frequently, and with more lethal results, than in Kano. Officers in Police Command in Kano describe its street crime as typical of any large, poor city, which they consider to be relatively manageable. While Islam--and to a certain extent Shari'a law--may serve to restrain individuals, those same people become very dangerous when formed into a mob, which the poor on Kano's streets are only too willing to join. End Comment.)

18. (C) Kwankwaso reiterated that many of Kano's poor Hausas were focusing much of their anger about their current economic circumstances on the perceived injustice against their kinsmen in the Ajegunle incident and its aftermath. He said that immediate revenge would have dissipated the collective anger generated by that incident. Kwankwaso added that he had been only half successful in preventing a recurrence of violence: while immediate reprisals for Ajegunle were averted, the anger it generated remains.

According to Kwankwaso, the desire for vengeance now appeared to be growing.

9. (C) Consulate General Lagos reports that the commission convened to study the causes of the Ajegunle riots is nearing the completion of its report. It appears that the Commission may adopt the conspiracy theory that the violence was instigated by a prominent Northerner to de-stabilize the country, and therefore conclude that the Hausas in the Ajegunle market riot started the violence and essentially provoked the conflict that led to their own deaths. The incident may have been sparked by one in a series of often-lethal market disputes. Whatever happened in Ajegunle, as far as many Northerners are concerned, the bare facts of the incident speak for themselves: Lagos' Yoruba majority killed a large number of its Hausa minority, suggesting the simpler explanation of long-standing inter-ethnic grievances boiling over, with the minority ethnic group taking the lion's share of the casualties. Not surprisingly, Hausas and Yorubas have divergent perspectives on those events, and on the Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC), that are not easily reconciled. The OPC is viewed by many Yoruba as a legitimate, civilian, cultural and law enforcement organization. It is generally viewed in the North as an criminal, para-military organization that targets other ethnic groups, and enjoys the tacit support of Governor Tinubu and his Attorney General, as well as GON Federal A.G. Bola Ige. Most Northerners believe that the OPC took the lead in the unrest that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Hausas.

10. (C) Amconsul Lagos reports that Governor Tinubu has engaged in an extensive effort to forestall a repeat of the violence that occurred last October. He has worked closely with leaders of the Hausa community in Lagos to prevent a take-over of an abbatoir by criminal elements, which would likely have resulted in violence. Acting in the ad-hoc manner of previous Heads of State, President Obasanjo has been reluctant to address this situation beyond traditional responses to immediate violence--police and army repression. He risks alienating what Yoruba base he has if he aggressively pursues the OPC, and is already viewed by much of the Northern leadership as having "gone ethnic." In the eyes of Northerners, neither Minister of Justice Bola Ige nor Governor Tinubu appear interested in prosecuting criminal acts by OPC members either. Although there are many Northerners serving in the Obasanjo Administration, including senior conservatives who remain loyal to his government, many other Hausas believe that President Obasanjo is representing Yoruba--rather than national--interests. Barring intervention by the Executive, the problem is left to the Governors, the police, and--if there is a truly serious outbreak of inter-communal violence--the military to solve.

11. Comment: Truth can remain highly elusive in any discussion across ethnic lines about occurrences of inter-ethnic violence in Nigeria. Unfortunately, Hausas in Kano are focusing their anger--largely derived from desperate economic circumstances--on the Ajegunle incident and their Yoruba brethren. There has been limited contact between Governors Tinubu and Kwankwaso, while the Mission maintains close ties with both. During a recent meeting with Governor Tinubu in Lagos, Ambassador Jeter raised the idea of a possible meeting between Tinubu and Kwankwaso. Tinubu said that our report about the situation in Kano confirmed what he had been hearing, and agreed to meet with Kwankwaso, most probably in Kaduna, using Governor Makarfi as a facilitator. (Note: As Makarfi is out of the country and Tinubu has not had time to broach this subject with him, this proposal should not be raised during Makarfi's upcoming visit to Washington. End Note.)

12. (C) Makarfi has set the standard for fostering co-operative relations among Governors across regional lines, and may prove to be instrumental in improving relations between Kwankwaso and Tinubu. It is encouraging that Governor Tinubu is aware--and concerned--about the plight of his kinsmen in Kano. Hopefully, these efforts will begin to dissipate some of the mis-directed ethnic resentment in Kano before another round of violence occurs. End Comment.
Jeter